# EXHIBIT 1

19-06-07875

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SEP 15 2021

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS HOUSTON DIVISION

Melisa Miller, District Clerk Montgomery County, Texas By

JAMES FLITSCH and CAROLYN \$
S. CLARK, \$
Plaintiffs, \$
v. \$
Civil Action No. H-21-1501

KRISTIN D. WILKINSON \$
GUARDINO et al., \$
Defendants. \$

**ORDER** 

Pending before the Court are Plaintiffs James Flitsch and Carolyn Clark's Combined Motion for Remand and Memorandum of Law in Support (Joined by Kevin Clark) (Document No. 11) and Plaintiffs James Flitsch's and Carolyn S. Clark's Objection to Defendants' Rejoinder and Motion to Strike (Document No. 15). Having considered the motions, submissions, and applicable law, the Court determines the motions should be granted.

## I. BACKGROUND

This case involves a dispute over a trust. Plaintiff Carolyn S. Clark ("Clark") is the creator and beneficiary of the Carolyn S. Clark Irrevocable Living Trust (the "Trust"). Plaintiff James Flitsch ("Flitsch") is an initial co-trustee of the Trust and is also a beneficiary. Defendant Kristin D. Wilkinson Guardino ("Wilkinson") helped

Minute Date: <u>09/15/202/</u> Clark set up the Trust. Defendant Kevin Clark ("Clark") was an initial co-trustee and beneficiary of the Trust who later resigned as co-trustee. Wilkinson and Defendant Leonard Guardino (collectively, the "Guardinos") allege they replaced Flitsch and Clark as co-trustees to the Trust. Plaintiffs allege the Guardinos attempted to become trustees to the Trust to improperly remove funds and that Clark was misled by Wilkinson when executing the Trust. Plaintiffs further allege the Guardinos are not and have never been co-trustees.

Based on the foregoing, on September 16, 2020, Plaintiffs filed this lawsuit against the Guardinos and Clark (collectively, "Defendants") in the 457th Judicial District Court of Montgomery County, Texas. Plaintiffs assert claims for: (1) declaratory relief regarding the trusteeship; (2) modification, reformation, and termination of the Trust; (3) theft under the Texas Theft Liability Act; (4) money had and received; and (5) unjust enrichment. On May 5, 2021, the Guardinos removed the case to this Court, asserting multiple bases for jurisdiction. On June 4, 2021, Plaintiffs moved to remand. On July 2, 2021, Plaintiffs moved to strike the Guardinos' surreply to the motion to remand.

### II. STANDARD OF REVIEW

A defendant may remove a case to federal court if the federal court has subject matter jurisdiction to hear the original complaint. 28 U.S.C. § 1441(a). Any doubts regarding whether federal jurisdiction is proper are resolved against federal

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jurisdiction. Acuna v. Brown & Root, Inc., 200 F.3d 335, 339 (5th Cir. 2000). The removing party bears the burden of establishing that a state court suit is removable to federal court. Manguno v. Prudential Prop. & Cas. Ins. Co., 276 F.3d 720, 723 (5th Cir. 2002). When evaluating a motion to remand, all factual allegations are considered in the light most favorable to the plaintiff, and any contested fact issues are resolved in the plaintiff's favor. Guillory v. PPG Indus., Inc., 434 F.3d 303, 308 (5th Cir. 2005). "[A]ny doubt about the propriety of removal must be resolved in favor of remand." Gasch v. Harford Acc. & Indem. Co., 491 F.3d 278, 281–82 (5th Cir. 2007).

### III. LAW & ANALYSIS

Plaintiffs move to remand this case to state court and to strike the Guardinos' surreply. The Court first considers the motion to strike before turning to the motion to remand.

### A. Motion to Strike

Plaintiffs move to strike the Guardinos' surreply, contending neither federal nor local rules provide for a surreply. Surreplies are highly disfavored because "[n]either the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure nor the Local Rules give parties the right to file a surreply." *BHL Boresight, Inc. v. Goe-Steering Sols., Inc.*, No. 4:15-CV-00627, 2017 WL 3634215, at \*2 (S.D. Tex. Aug. 24, 2017) (Harmon, J.). Surreplies are also disfavored for being "a strategic effort . . . to have the last word

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on a matter." *Id.* (quoting *Weaver v. Celebration Station Props., Inc.*, No. H-14-2233, 2015 WL 1932030, at \*3 (S.D. Tex. Apr. 28, 2015) (Rosenthal, J.)). A party must therefore file a motion for leave before filing a surreply. *Woolard v. Fluor Enters., Inc.*, No. 4:10-CV-3623, 2013 WL 596581, at \*4 (S.D. Tex. Feb. 15, 2013) (Ellison, J.). "Leave to file a surreply is not appropriate 'where the proposed surreply does not include new arguments or evidence or merely restates arguments in the movant's response." *ENGlobal U.S. Inc. v. Native Am. Servs. Corp.*, No. CV H-16-02746, 2017 WL 3840262, at \*2 (S.D. Tex. Sept. 1, 2017) (Rosenthal, J.) (quoting *Makhlouf v. Tailored Brands, Inc.*, No. CV H-16-0838, 2017 WL 10922311, at \*5 (S.D. Tex. Mar. 23, 2017) (Harmon, J.)).

The Guardinos did not seek leave to file a surreply. Further, the Guardinos do not point to any new legal arguments or theories raised in Plaintiffs' reply. The Court therefore finds the Guardinos' surreply is not appropriate. Accordingly, the motion to strike is granted. The Court will not consider the Guardino's surreply in the remainder of this Order. The Court next addresses the motion to remand.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The Guardinos contend they did not receive proper notice of the motion to strike and the motion does not include a certificate of conference as required by Local Rule 7.1(D). Because the Guardinos' surreply is improperly before this Court due to the failure to move for leave, the Court need not address these contentions.

### B. Motion to Remand

Plaintiffs contend, *inter alia*, remand is necessary as not all Defendants have consented to removal. Specifically, Plaintiffs assert Clark does not consent to removal and has joined Plaintiffs in their motion to remand.<sup>2</sup> The Guardinos contend Clark is a nominal defendant, rendering his consent unnecessary.<sup>3</sup>

All defendants must join in a petition for removal. 28 U.S.C. § 1446(a); Ortiz v. Young, 431 F. App'x 306, 307 (5th Cir. 2011) (citing Tri-Cities Newspapers, Inc. v. Tri-Cities Printing Pressmen & Assistants' Local 349, 427 F.2d 325, 326–27 (5th Cir. 1970)). If a defendant does not consent to removal, removal is defective, making remand appropriate. See id. The removing defendants have the burden of showing all defendants have consented to removal or that a defendant's consent is not required. Breitling v. LNV Corp., 86 F. Supp. 3d 564, 570 (N.D. Tex. 2015) (Lynn, J.). An exception to the general requirement of unanimity of consent is if the non-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Plaintiffs James Flitsch and Carolyn Clark's Combined Motion for Remand and Memorandum of Law in Support (Joined by Kevin Clark), Document No. 11 at 14–15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The Court notes, on October 20, 2020, the Guardinos previously removed this case to this Court. In that removal, the Guardinos failed to show Clark's consent was unnecessary, and the case was remanded. *Plaintiffs James Flitsch and Carolyn Clark's Combined Motion for Remand and Memorandum of Law in Support (Joined by Kevin Clark*), Document No. 11, Exhibit E at 1 (*Order*). The Guardinos assertion that Clark is a nominal defendant is a new argument, however, and can be addressed in this subsequent removal. *See Kindred Hosps. Ltd. P'ship v. Aetna Life Ins. Co.*, No. 3:18-CV-1099-D, 2018 WL 4215118, at \*3 (N.D. Tex. Sept. 5, 2018) (Fitzwater, J.) (citing *S.W.S. Erectors, Inc. v. Infax, Inc.*, 72 F.3d 489, 492 (5th Cir. 1996)).

consenting defendant is a nominal party. In re Beazley Ins. Co., No. 09-20005, 2009 WL 7361370, at \*4 (5th Cir. May 4, 2009) (citing Farias v. Bexar Cty. Bd. Of Trustees for Mental Health Mental Retardation Servs., 925 F.2d 866, 971 (5th Cir. 1991)). "To establish that non-removing parties are nominal parties, the removing party must show... there is no possibility that the plaintiff would be able to establish a cause of action against the non-removing defendants in state court." Id. (quoting Farias, 925 F.2d at 971).

Plaintiffs assert claims against Clark in his individual capacity for, *inter alia*, theft under the Texas Theft Liability Act ("TTLA"). For all TTLA claims, the plaintiff must establish: (1) the plaintiff had a possessory right to property; (2) the defendant unlawfully appropriated property; and (3) the plaintiff sustained damages as a result of the theft. *Wellogix*, *Inc. v. Accenture*, *LLP*, 788 F. Supp. 2d 523, 542 (S.D. Tex. 2011) (Ellison, J.) (citing Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code §§ 134.002(2), 134.003, 134.005(a); Tex. Penal Code §§ 31.03(a)). Plaintiffs allege: (1) Flitsch was a beneficiary of the Trust; (2) Clark resigned as co-trustee from the Trust; (2) on March 29, 2019, Clark withdrew money from the Trust without legal authority; and (4) Flitsch is not likely to recover those funds. The Guardinos do not

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Plaintiffs James Flitsch and Carolyn Clark's Combined Motion for Remand and Memorandum of Law in Support (Joined by Kevin Clark), Document No. 11, Exhibit G, ¶¶ 56–63 (Third Amended Original Petition Seeking Constructive Trust and Declaratory Judgment and Request for Temporary Restraining Order and Temporary Injunction and Petition for Judicial Modification, Reformation or Termination of Trust).

contend Plaintiffs cannot establish this cause of action. Rather, the Guardinos allege (1) Clark is no longer a co-trustee, and (2) real estate designated for Clark has been sold. Neither of these allegations address the claims against Clark as an individual.

Considering Plaintiffs' allegations as to the TTLA, the Court finds the Guardinos fail to show Plaintiffs cannot establish a cause of action against Clark in state court. The Court therefore finds the Guardinos fail to establish Clark is a nominal defendant. Thus, Clark's consent for removal is necessary. Because Clark does not consent to removal, the Court finds remand is necessary. Accordingly, the motion to remand is granted.<sup>5</sup>

### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing, the Court hereby

**ORDERS** that Plaintiffs James Flitsch and Carolyn S. Clark's Objection to Defendants' Rejoinder and Motion to Strike (Document No. 15) is **GRANTED**. The Court further

ORDERS that Plaintiffs James Flitsch and Carolyn Clark's Combined Motion for Remand (Document No. 11) is GRANTED. This case is therefore REMANDED to the 457th Judicial District Court of Montgomery County, Texas.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Plaintiffs also contend: (1) the last removal attempt by the Guardinos precludes repeated jurisdictional claims; (2) the Guardinos cannot establish jurisdiction based on their counterclaim; (3) supplemental jurisdiction claims fail; and (4) the defects cannot be cured. In light of the Court's holding, the Court need not address these contentions.



SIGNED at Houston, Texas, on this 22 day of July, 2021.

DAVID HITTNER
United States District Judge

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# IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS HOUSTON DIVISION

<i>IN RE</i> THE CAROLYN S. CLARK IRREVOCABLE LIVING TRUST	§ 8	
U/T/A JULY 28, 2017; No. 19-06-07875	\$ §	CASE NO
IN THE DISTRICT COURT	§	
457TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT,	§	JURY TRIAL DEMANDED
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, TEXAS	§	

# INDEX OF ATTACHED DOCUMENTS BEING FILED TOGETHER WITH THE NOTICE OF REMOVAL, INCLUDING ALL PROCESS, PLEADINGS, AND ORDERS SERVED UPON THE DEFENDANTS AND ON FILE IN THE STATE COURT CASE, PURSUANT TO 28 U.S.C. § 1446(a)

1. The following items are attached pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1446(a) and filed together with the Notice of Removal:

<u>Index</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	Description
110.		
1	06/07/2019	Temporary Restraining Order
2	06/10/2019	First Amended Temporary Restraining Order
3	06/18/2019	Executed Citation to Kevin Clark
4	06/18/2019	Executed Temporary Restraining Order to Kevin Clark
5	06/18/2019	Executed Citation to Diane Clark
6	06/18/2019	Executed Temporary Restraining Order to Diane Clark
7	06/20/2019	Executed Citation to Kristin Wilkinson (Guardino)
8	06/20/2019	Executed Temporary Restraining Order to Kristin Wilkinson Guardino
9	06/20/2019	Kevin J Clark's Original Answer
10	06/21/2019	Signed Agreed Extension of the First Amended Temporary Restraining Order
11	07/11/2019	Executed Temporary Restraining Order to Lisa Seigel
12	07/15/2019	Kristin Wilkinson Guardino's and Leonard Guardino's Original Answer

<u>Index</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	Description
13	07/16/2019	Kristin Wilkinson Guardino's and Leonard Guardino's Original Answer, Affirmative Defenses
14	07/16/2019	Kristin Wilkinson Guardino's and Leonard Guardino's Motion to Remove James Flitsch as Trustee
15	07/17/2019	Kristin Wilkinson Guardino's and Leonard Guardino's Brief Opposing Plaintiff's Request for Temporary Injunction
16	07/29/2019	Signed Order Granting Mutual Temporary Injunction
17	07/29/2019	Partial Order of Dismissal of Request for Constructive Trust
18	07/30/2019	Plaintiffs' Second Amended Original Petition Seeking Constructive Trust and Declaratory Judgment and Request for Temporary Restraining Order and Temporary Injunction
19	10/08/2019	Signed First Amended Order Granting Mutual Temporary Injunction
20	11/01/2019	Second Amended Order Granting Mutual Temporary Injunction
21	12/23/2019	Intervention and Petition for Declaratory Judgment of Nicole B. Davis and Courtney M. Lyssy as Co-Trustees of the Carolyn Clark Irrevocable Living Trust U/T/A July 28, 2017
22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 31a	12/31/2019 12/31/2019 12/31/2019 12/31/2019 12/31/2019 12/31/2019 12/31/2019 01/06/2020 01/07/2020 01/09/2020 01/15/2020	Certified Mail Citation to Carolyn Clark Certified Mail Citation to Diane Clark Certified Mail Citation to Kevin Clark Certified Mail Citation to Jillian Renee Deutmeyer Certified Mail Citation to Lisa Siegle Priority Mail International to Samantha Maye Simone's De Arias Certified Mail Citation to Chandra Lea Sims Executed-Clark, Diane M - Certified Mail Citation Returned CMRRR Chandra Leah Sims Returned CMRRR Seigel, Lisa R - Certified Mail Citation Returned CMRRR Jillian Renee Deutmeyer
32	01/07/2020	Kristin Wilkinson Guardino's and Leonard Guardino's First Supplement to Original Answer

<u>Index</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Description</u>
33	01/13/2020	Kevin J. Clark's First Supplemental to Original Answer
33a	01/22/2020	Release of Exhibits to Court Reporter Martha Koomar, CCL
34	02/13/2020	Interim Trustees' Application for Reimbursement of Funds
35	02/27/2020	Defendant Carolyn Clark's Original Answer to the Intervention and Petition for Declaratory Judgment
36	02/27/2020	Plaintiff James Flitsch's Original Answer to the Intervention and Petition for Declaratory Judgment
37	04/09/2020	Plaintiffs' Motion to Strike Defendants' Kristin Guardino and Leonard Guardino Answers
38	04/24/2020	Signed Order Approving Reimbursement of Funds
39	04/24/2020	Intra-County Court Transfer Order - Order Accepting Request for Transfer (from CCL #2 to 410th)
40	04/24/2020	Traditional Motion for Partial Summary Judgment (Construction of Trust)
41	04/27/2020	Defendants' Response and Objections to Plaintiffs' Motion to Strike Defendants' Pleadings and Proposed Order Denying Plaintiffs' Motion to Strike Defendants' Kristin Wilkinson and Len Guardino
42	05/07/2020	Reply in Support of Plaintiffs' Motion to Strike Defendants' Kristin Wilkinson's and Leonard Guardino's Answers
43	05/08/2020	Defendant's Motion to Continue
44	05/11/2020	Defendants'/Counter-Plaintiffs' Response to Motion for Traditional Partial Summary Judgment and Proposed Judgment
45	05/13/2020	Signed Order on Plaintiffs' Motion to Strike
46	05/14/2020	Response to the Motion to Continue the Partial Summary Judgment Submission Date

<u>Index</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	Description	
47	05/14/2020	Notice of Submission of Replacement Page Twenty to Defendants/Counter Plaintiffs' Kristin Wilkinson Notice of Submission	
48	05/18/2020	Reply in Support of Plaintiffs' Motion for Partial Summary Judgment (Construction of Trust)	
49	05/21/2020	Defendants/Counter Plaintiffs' Rejoinder to Plaintiffs/Counter Defendants Reply to Defendants	
50	05/27/2020	Second Reply in Support of Plaintiffs' Motion for Partial Summary Judgment (Construction of Trust)	
51	(Number not used)		
52	06/01/2020	Defendants' Motion to Strike Plaintiffs James Flitsch Second Reply in Support of Plaintiffs Motion for Partial Summary Judgment (Construction of Trust) and Second Objection to the Motion for Removal	
53	06/04/2020	Kevin Clark's Wavier of Notice and Citation of Intervention of Interim Trustees	
54	(Number not u	used)	
55	07/08/2020	Signed Order Approving Application for Authority to Pay Interim Fees of Interim Co-Trustees	
56	07/14/2020	Signed Order For Additional Briefing	
57	07/27/2020	Defendants' Response to and Motion for Clarification of the Court's Orders of May 13, 2020, and July 14, 2020	
58	07/27/2020	Plaintiff's Brief Regarding the Impact of the Order Striking Pleadings	
59	07/31/2020	Plaintiffs' Response and Motion to Strike Wilkinson's and Guardino's Brief Regarding the Impact of the Order Striking Pleadings	
60	08/04/2020	Intra-County Court Transfer Order - administrative order	

<u>Index</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Description</u>
61	08/04/2020	Defendants/Reply to Plaintiff's/Response to Defendants/Responsive Brief and Motion for Clarification of the Court's Orders of May 13, 2020, and July 14, 2020
62	08/04/2020	Plaintiff's Reply to Wilkinson-Guardino's And Guardino's Reply to Plaintiff's Response
63	08/21/2020	ORDER on Traditional Motion for Partial S.J.
64	09/10/2020	457th - Docket Control Order
65	09/17/2020	Interim Co-Trustees' Notice of Change of Firm
66	09/28/2020	James Flitsch's and Carolyn Clark's Motion for Disbursement from Trust
67	09/28/2020	Plaintiffs' Third Amended Original Petition Seeking Constructive Trust and Declaratory Judgment and Request for Temporary Restraining Order and Temporary Injunction <u>and Petition for Judicial Modification</u> , <u>Reformation or Termination of Trust</u>
68	09/28/2020	Standard Citation - Lisa R. Seigel
69	10/06/2020	Executed Citation- Diane M Clark
70	10/20/2020	Return of Service - Executed Citation to Lisa Seigel
71	10/20/2020	Notice of Removal 157
72	01/19/2021	Bench Trial 457th - Docket Control Order
73	03/03/2021	Remanded to Trial Court (OCA) United States District Court Southern District of Texas Houston Division Signed Order; Fed Ex Envelope Remanded Order
74	03/09/2021	Amended Notice of Hearing on Plaintiffs' Motion for Disbursement from Trust
75	03/11/2021	Second Amended Notice of Hearing on Plaintiffs' Motion for Disbursement from Trust

<u>Index</u> <u>No.</u>	<u>Date</u>	Description	
76	03/24/2021	Defendant's Kristin Wilkinson Guardino and Leonard Guardino Second Supplement	
77	03/24/2021 Request For Service f/c citation to Stilwell, Earl & Apostolakis, LLP f/c citation to James Graham f/c citation to Steven C. Earl f/c citation to Carolyn S Clark Irrevocable Living Trust f/c citation to Carolyn S Clark f/c of citation to James Flitsch Return of Service - Executed to James Flitsch Return of Service - Executed to Carolyn S. Clark Return of Service - Executed to The Carolyn S. Clark Return of Service - Executed to Steven C. Earl Return of Service - Executed to James E. Graham Return of Service - Executed to Stilwell, Earl, & Apostolakis, LLP		
78	04/07/2021	457th Hearing Notice Form Hearing notice email confirmation	
79	04/08/2021	457th Hearing Notice Form Hearing notice email confirmation (4/16/21)	
80	04/08/2021	457th Hearing Notice Form Hearing notice email confirmation (4/16/21)	
81	04/15/2021	Plaintiffs' Motion to Dismiss the Newly Pled CounterClaims with	
82	04/15/2021	Prejudice Notice of Hearing on Plaintiffs' Motion to Dismiss	
83	04/16/2021	Signed Order Granting Plaintiffs' Motion for Disbursement from Trust	
84	Notice Letter to Diane Clark		
85	Notice Letter to Lisa Seigel		
86	Notice Letter to Jillian Deutmeyer		
87	04/16/2021	457th Hearing Notice Form	
88	04/16/2021	Certified Copy of Remand Order	

Index No.	<u>Date</u>	<u>Description</u>
89	04/16/2021	Plea to Jurisdiction
90	04/16/2021	Plaintiff's Lawyers' Motion to Dismiss the Newly Pled Counterclaims with
91	04/16/2021	Prejudice Under Notice of Hearing on Plaintiffs' Motion to Dismiss
92	04/26/2021	Return of Service - Executed to James Flitsch
93	04/26/2021	Return of Service - Executed to Carolyn S. Clark
94	04/26/2021	Return of Service - Executed to The Carolyn S. Clark Irrevocable Living Trust
95	04/26/2021	Return of Service - Executed to Steven C. Earl
96	04/26/2021	Return of Service - Executed to James E. Graham
97	04/26/2021	Return of Service - Executed to Stilwell, Earl, & Apostolakis, LLP
98	04/26/2021	Copy of Executed Citation - Stilwell, Earl, and Apostolakis LLP
99	04/26/2021	Copy of Executed Citation - The Carolyn S. Clark Irrevocable Living Trust
100	04/26/2021	Copy of Montgomery County Precinct 3 Service Receipt
101	04/26/2021	Copy of Harris County Service Receipt
102	04/27/2021	Application for Authority to Pay Appointee Fees and Expenses
103	04/27/2021	Proposed Order Authorizing Payment of Appointee Fees and Expenses
104	05/03/2021	Notice Regarding Untimely Response
105	05/05/2021	Notice of Hearing
106	05/05/02021	Defendants' Guardino Third Supplement to Their Original Answer and Counterclaims

107	05/05/2021	Notice of Removal to Federal Court
108	06/04/2021	Notice of Hearing
109	07/27/2021	Signed Order Remanding Case
110	08/06/2021	Copy of Remand Order filed by Plaintiffs' Counsel
111	09/15/2021	Plaintiffs' Counsel Motion to Dismiss Guardinos' Third Supplement to Their Original Answer and Counterclaims
112	09/17/2021	Notice of Appearance
113	09/17/2021	Notice of Hearing on Plaintiffs' Motion to Dismiss
114	10/15/2021	Defendants' Guardino Response to Plaintiffs' Motion to Dismiss
115	10/15/2021	Defendants' Guardino proposed Order denying Motion to Dismiss
116	10/20/2021	Plaintiff's Reply to Defendants' Guardino Response to Plaintiffs' Motion to Dismiss
117	10/22/2021	Plaintiffs' proposed Order
118	10/25/2021	Signed Order Granting Plaintiffs Lawyers' Motion to Dismiss Defendants' Guardino Counterclaims with Prejudice
119	10/25/2021	Notice of Hearing
120	10/28/2021	Notice of Hearing
121	10/28/2021	First Amended Order Granting Plaintiffs' Lawyers' Motion to Dismiss Defendants' Guardino Counterclaims with Prejudice
122	11/02/2021	Order Denying Defendants' Guardino Request to Attend Hearing Via Videoconference
123	11/05/2021	Notice of Hearing